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ABSTRACT

Accurately estimating the number of female high school administrators is difficult because (1) comprehensive studies by individual position are nonexistent; (2) most state departments of education do not collect or report such data; (3) limited samples are used in studies; and (4) researchers and reporters tend to aggregate positions. Researchers are divided as to female administrators' progress during the past decade. This situation led to companion studies aiming (1) to determine whether the status of female high school administrators has changed since 1972; and (2) to develop baseline data for monitoring female status in line administrative positions. This paper summarizes study data that addresses the question of women high school principals and assistant principals. The first study examined 44 of the largest U.S. school districts. In the second study, various district types (urban, suburban, medium city, and rural) in Tennessee were examined to see if findings in the largest districts were mirrored in all types of districts in one state. Data were secured for 1972, 1982, and 1986. (The studies will be replicated in 1986.) Results clearly showed gains in status and representation of women high school administrators since 1972, particularly in large city districts. In 1986, women held 23 percent of high school principalships (up from 6 percent in 1972) and 32 percent of assistant principalships (up from 19 percent in 1972). Women are making steady, less spectacular progress in suburban, medium-sized, and rural districts. Included are nine references. (MLH)

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Secondary Schools in Transition: A Study of the Emerging Female Administrator

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Secondary Schools in Transition: A Study of
the Emerging Female Administrator

Descriptions of high school principals have traditionally begun with the word "male". While women have held this position, their numbers have been few. Females were reported to be 3% of the high school principals in a 1971 national study (NEA, 1971). A follow-up study reported a drop in that percentage to 1.4% (NEA, 1973). What has happened since is more difficult to discern because (1) comprehensive national studies by individual position have not been reported, (2) most state departments of education do not collect and/or report such data (Jones and Montenegro, 1982; McCarthy and Zent, 1980), (3) limited samples are used in studies (Jones and Montenegro, 1982; Cronin and Pancrazio, 1979), and (4) researchers and reporters tend to aggregate positions.

In the wake of this uncertain situation, writers have variously declared that females in administration are declining or are increasing. Fleming argued that "the gains have been uneven...but the trend is unmistakable (1985)." Kaplan argued, "The sluggish, even decelerating pace at which women and members of racial and ethnic minority groups are passing into the upper reaches of educational leadership remains a rankling sore spot (1985)." Which is it for females in administration? In particular, what is the status of females in high school administration?

These unresolved issues led to the development of companion studies whose purpose was (1) to determine whether there has been

change in the status of females in high school administration since 1972, and (2) to develop baseline data from which to continue to monitor the status of females in line administrative positions. Each study had a larger focus than high school positions, but this paper will report on the work undertaken to address the question of females in high school principalships and assistant principalships.

Method

The first study attempted to look at the status and condition of females in high school administration from a national perspective, looking at school districts in which females were most likely to have made gains since 1972. To that end, 44 of the largest (student enrollment) school districts in the nation were selected. In the second study the variable of type of district, urban, suburban, medium-city, and rural, following the categories used by McCarthy and Zent (1980) was used to determine if what was found in the largest districts in the nation was mirrored in all types of districts. The second study concentrated on one state, Tennessee, and used all of the school districts that fit the defined categories, 2 urban, 6 suburban, 5 medium-city, and 7 rural. The number of each type of district was roughly proportionate to its representation in the state.

In each study, data about the number of high school principal and assistant principal positions and the females

holding each of these positions, were secured for three points in time, 1972, 1982, 1986. The year 1972 was used because it was the last year for which there were verifiable comparative statistics by position, and because it coincided with the passage of Title IX of the Educational Amendments which prohibited sex discrimination in education and called attention to the relative absence of women in educational administration. The year 1982 was used because it was ten years later and marked a point at which intense social and legislative pressure to appoint females to administrative positions was still being felt. The year 1986 was a recent point in time, one in which the pressure to appoint females had visibly lessened. The authors intend to replicate the studies in 1992.

Paired data were secured from the 44 large school districts and the 20 varied-type school districts. The data were analyzed separately, large district separate from type of district. Data were compared for three periods, 1972-1982, 1982-1986, 1972-1986, to see if there had been changes in the number of positions and the gender of the office holders. Large districts were analyzed as a group (n=44) for each time period. The same was done with the varied-type districts, within each type and as a whole (n=20). Paired t-tests were used to determine whether changes identified were significant. Results from large districts were compared with results from varied-type districts to see if what was found in large districts was idiosyncratic to them,

representative of what was occurring in school districts in general, or a harbinger of things to come.

Results

Table I shows the number of male and female principals and assistant principals in the 44 large city school districts 1972, 1982, 1986. The number of high school principal positions increased steadily in each time period, 1972-1982, 1982-1986, 1972-1986, 679 to 743 to 858, an increase of 179 positions over the period 1972-1986 (26% increase). The number of female high school principals increased sharply in each time period from 38 to 109 to 199, an increase of 161 positions 1972-1986 (424% increase). The number of male high school principals declined

Table I

Males and Females in High School Administration in Large City Districts

Position	Year	Number of Systems	Total Positions	# Males	# Females	% Female	% Male
Principal	1972	43	679	641	38	5.6	94.4
High School	1982	43	743	634	109	14.7	85.3
	1986	44	858	659	199	23.2	76.8
Assistant	1972	43	1388	1125	263	18.9	81.1
High School	1982	43	1715	1260	455	26.5	73.5
	1986	44	2494	1700	794	31.8	68.2

slightly 1972-1982 (641 to 634) and then increased 1982-1986 (634 to 659) for a modest increase of 18 positions 1972-1986 (3% increase).

The number of high school assistant principal positions in the 44 large city districts increased dramatically in each time period, 1388 to 1715 to 2494, an increase of 1106 positions 1972-1986 (80% increase). The number of female assistant principals increased sharply in each time period, 263 to 455 to 794, an increase of 531 positions 1972 to 1986 (202% increase). The number of male assistant principals increased sharply in each time period as well, 1125 to 1260 to 1700, an increase of 575 positions 1972 to 1986 (51% increase).

Table II shows the number of male and female principals and assistant principals by type of district (urban, suburban, medium-city, rural) 1972, 1982, 1986. Looked at as a whole (n=20), the number of high school principal positions increased by one position in each time period, 76 to 77 to 78. The number of females increased in each time period 0 to 5 to 9. The number of males decreased in each time period, 76 to 72 to 69.

There were no female high school principals in any of the 4 types of districts studied in 1872. This remained true for suburban and rural districts in 1982 and 1986. In medium-city districts there was one female high school principal in 1982. She was still the only female in the position in 1986. In urban districts the number of females increased from 0 to 4, 1972 to 1982. The number doubled 1982 to 1986, from 4 to 8, despite the

Table II

Males and Females in High School Administration
in Varied-Type Districts

District	Year	Number of Systems	Total Positions	# Males	# Females	% Female	% Male
			Principal High School				
Urban	1972	2	39	39	0	0	100
Sub.		5	12	12	0	0	100
M-C		4	14	14	0	0	100
Rural		6	11	11	0	0	100
Total		17	76	76	0	0	100
Urban	1982	2	52	48	4	8	92
Sub.		5	10	10	0	0	100
M-C		4	8	7	1	12	88
Rural		6	7	7	0	0	100
Total		17	77	72	5	6.5	93.5
Urban	1986	2	47	39	8	17	83
Sub.		5	11	11	0	0	100
M-C		4	7	6	1	14	86
Rural		6	13	13	0	0	100
Total		17	78	69	9	11.5	88.5
			Assistant High School				
Urban	1972	2	59	54	5	8	92
Sub.		5	6	6	0	0	100
M-C		3	6	6	0	0	100
Rural		3	3	3	0	0	100
Total		13	74	69	5	6.5	93.5
Urban	1982	2	110	93	17	15	85
Sub.		5	7	6	1	14	86
M-C		3	6	6	0	0	100
Rural		3	3	3	0	0	100
Total		13	126	108	18	14	86
Urban	1986	2	114	85	29	25	75
Sub.		5	25	20	5	20	80
M-C		4	17	14	3	18	82
Rural		4	12	10	2	17	83
Total		15	168	129	39	23	77

fact that the total number of high school positions in urban districts had declined from 52 to 47. In suburban and rural districts the number of male high school principals decreased 1972-1982, but increased 1982-1986. In urban and medium-city districts the number of males decreased in both time periods.

Overall, the number of high school assistant principal positions increased markedly 1972 to 1982 and 1982 to 1986. The change 1972 to 1982 was fueled almost totally by additions in the urban districts (59 to 110). In the period 1982 to 1986, the number of assistant principal positions in urban districts remained virtually the same, but the number of positions in the other three types of districts increased noticeably (16 to 54).

The number of female high school assistant principals increased 1972 to 1982 and 1982 to 1986. In 1972, only five females held positions as assistant principals. These were all in urban districts. Suburban, medium-city, and rural districts had no female assistant principals. By 1982, suburban districts had one female high school assistant principal and urban districts had increased the number of females to 17. By 1986, all four types of districts had female assistant principals. In suburban, medium-city, and rural districts, the number of male assistant principals remained the same 1972 to 1982, and increased 1982 to 1986. In the urban districts the number of males increased 1972 to 1982, then decreased 1982 to 1986.

Figure 1 compares male and female principals by year and kind of district (4 types plus large city). Figure 2 does the

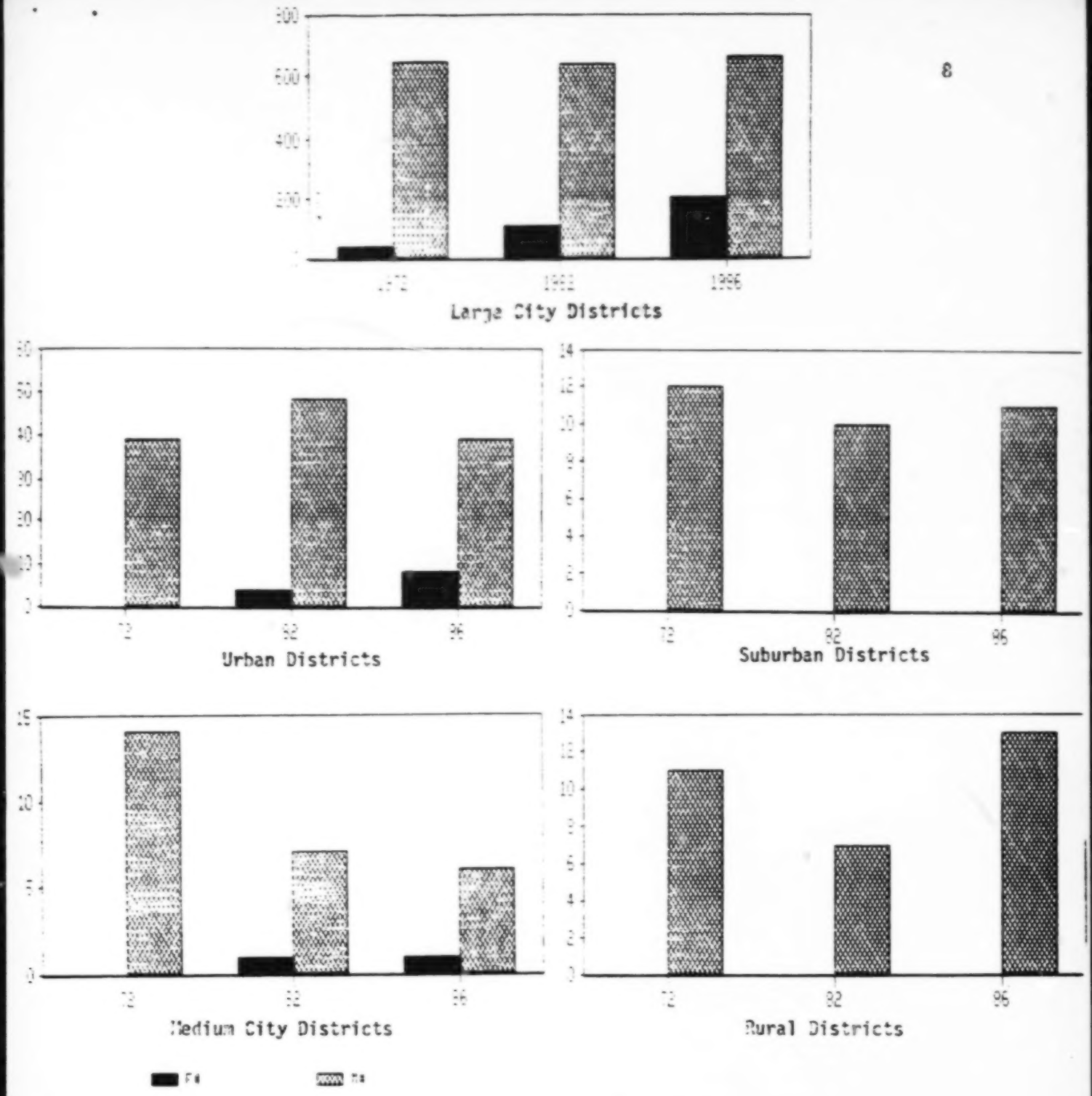

Figure 1. Comparison of Male and Female Principals by Year and Kind of District

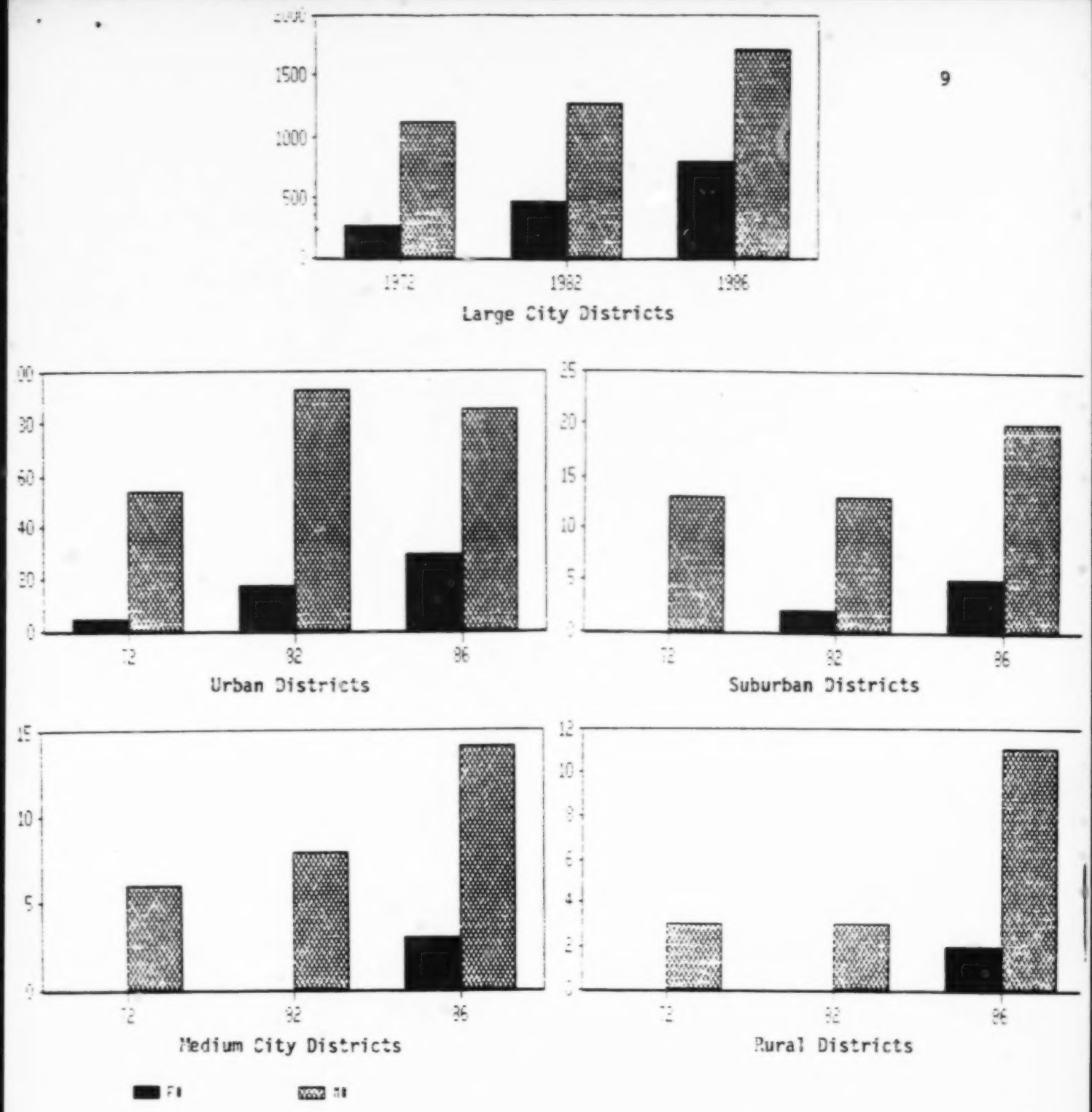

Figure 2. Comparison of Male and Female Assistant Principals by Year and Kind of District

same thing with assistant principals. They show, in striking visual terms, the continued dominance of males in both positions, in all kinds of districts. There are still types of districts which have yet to appoint a female principal and individual school systems within types of districts that have yet to appoint a female principal, however, the emergence of females in these positions is evident in the figures. It is most evident in large city districts.

Table III presents the results of t-tests applied to change in the number of women holding principal and assistant principal

Table III

Tests of Significance of Change
in Large City and Varied-Type Districts

District	Period Under Consideration	t Value	Significance Level
		High School Principal	
Large City	1972-1982	-5.60	<.001*
	1982-1986	-6.30	<.001*
	1972-1986	-9.31	<.001*
Varied-Type	1972-1982	-1.58	.1235
	1982-1986	- .33	.7384
	1072-1986	-1.80	.0808
		High School Assistant Principal	
Large City	1972-1982	-6.71	<.001*
	1982-1986	-3.64	<.001*
	1972-1986	-8.33	<.001*
Varied-Type	1972-1982	-1.462	.1817
	1982-1986	-1.039	.3087
	1972-1986	-2.489	.0201*

* Statistically Significant

positions in large city districts and varied-type districts 1972-1982, 1982-1986, 1972-1986. In large city districts increases in female principals and assistant principals were significant at the .001 level in each time period. In varied-type districts as a whole, increases in female high school principals had a significance level of .1235 1972-1982, had no significance 1982-1986, and had a significance level of .0808 1972-1986. Increases in female high school assistant principals had a significance level of .1818 1972-1982, had no significance 1982-1986, and were statistically significant at the .0201 level 1972-1986. Because the N for the 4 types of districts was so small, the results of the t-tests were less than revealing.

Conclusions

The results of the companion studies of large city and varied-type districts clearly showed a change in the status, no less the representation, of females in high school principal and assistant principal positions since 1972. The changes were most obvious in the large city districts where females held 23% of the high school principalships and 32% of the high school assistant principalships in 1986. Clearly this went beyond token representation. The changes in urban districts mirrored the changes in large city districts most closely, for obvious reasons. Females in high school administration are still a relatively new phenomenon in suburban, medium-city, and rural districts, so the status and representation of females is less

evident. However, even those types of districts which have not yet had female high school principals (suburban, rural), have increasing numbers of females in high school assistant principal positions, a position long-considered a prerequisite and stepping-stone to the high school principalship.

In terms of the question posed earlier, the results suggest that large city districts are indeed harbingers of things to come, that what has happened in large city districts is a predictor of what is happening in other types of districts, albeit slower and in smaller numbers. We appear to be in a period of transition marked by the emergence of females in high school administration. It is reasonable to conclude that the results signal a change from the traditional description of principal (and assistant principal), to a new, non-gender defined description.

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